

CHAPTER 38

Sâd

(REVEALED AT MAKKAH: 5 *sections*; 88 *verses*)

The chapter is entitled Sâd from its initial letter, which stands for Sâdiq or *Truthful* God. It describes the sufferings of prophets at the hands of their enemies. Even prophets like Dâwûd and Sulaimân, who ruled mighty kingdoms, and like Ayyûb, who had been granted abundance, did not escape opposition and had to suffer at the hands of their enemies. But as the name of the chapter signifies, Allâh was a *Truthful Deity*, Who at the height of opposition foretold the discomfiture of the enemy, and the final triumph of Truth.

The date of the revelation of this chapter may be fixed at about the same time as that of the preceding one. The opposition had no doubt grown intense, and the earlier emigration may have already taken place, or may have followed it soon. It may be placed about the close of the early Makkan period. The first section clearly speaks of the determined opposition of the enemy and prophesies his discomfiture; the second asserts how even a king-prophet like Dâwûd had his enemies, and how he was delivered from their hands; the third states that even Sulaimân with all his glory could not escape the opposition of enemies, yet it was the grace of Allâh, not the glory of his kingdom, that delivered him from his enemies. Ayyûb's sufferings are spoken of in the fourth section, and the triumph of the righteous is plainly stated. The typical opposition of the devil to the prophet-man forms the subject-matter of the concluding section.

SECTION 1: The Enemy's Discomfiture

In the name of Allâh, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

1 Sâd By the Qur'ân, possessing eminence!^a

2 Nay, those who disbelieve are in self-exaltation and opposition.

3 How many a generation We destroyed before them, then they cried when there was no longer time for escape!^a

4 And they wonder that a warner from among themselves has come to them, and the disbelievers say: This is an enchanter, a liar.

5 Makes he the deities a single Deity? Surely this is a strange thing.

6 And the chiefs among them say: Go and steadily adhere to your deities: surely this is a thing intended.^a

7 We never heard of this in the former faith: this is nothing but a forgery.

8 Has the Reminder been revealed to him from among us? Nay, they are in doubt as to My Reminder. Nay, they have not yet tasted My chastisement.

1a. *Dhikr* means *eminence* here, as in 2:152 (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). The calling to witness of the Qur'ân possessing eminence indicates that the truth of the Qur'ân will become manifest by the eminence to which it will raise those who follow it.

3a. That is, they did not heed the warning, but cried for help when punishment actually overtook them, and there was no escape from it.

6a. By *a thing intended* is meant that it is a thing which the Prophet intends to bring about but which he cannot, or that the appearance of the Prophet is one of the disasters decreed by fate.

9 Or, have they the treasures of the mercy of your *Rabb*, the Mighty, the Great Giver?

10 Or is the kingdom of the *samâwât* and the earth and what is between them theirs? Then let them rise higher in means.^a

11 What an army of the allies is here put to flight!^a

12 The people of Nûh, and 'Âd, and Pharaoh, the lord of hosts,^a rejected (prophets) before them,

13 And Thamûd and the people of Lût and the dwellers of the grove. These were the parties (opposing Truth).

14 Not one of them but rejected the messengers, so just was My retribution.

SECTION 2: Dâwûd's Enemies

15 And these wait but for one cry, wherein there is no delay.

10a. By *asbâb* (*means*) are meant the means to strengthen their own power or the means to bring about the vanquishment of Truth. Their *rising higher* or *ascending in means* stands for having recourse to all the means they can think of. As they were powerful in the land and masters of it, they should find the best means to retain their power, and prove the warning of the Prophet to be false. That they will not be able to do so, they are told in the next verse.

11a. This is a prophecy relating to the discomfiture and overthrow of the opponents of Islâm when they combine all possible forces against it. The Prophet is thus not only enjoined patience under his present sufferings, but he is further told that the opposition against him will assume yet more formidable proportions. He is comforted at the same time with the knowledge that the combined forces of opposition will be utterly routed and overthrown. This happened in the battle known as *the battle of the Ahzâb*, or the battle of the Allies; see 33:22a.

12a. *Autâd* is the plural of *watad*, which means literally *a peg* firmly driven into the ground. But it is frequently used metaphorically. Thus *autad al-bilâd* signifies *the chiefs of the towns, provinces, or countries* (*Lisân al-‘Arab* (Dictionary), by ‘Allâmah Abu-l-Faḍl Jamâl al-Dîn Muḥammad ibn Mukarram and the *Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). *Anwâr al-Tanzîl wa Asrâr al-Ta‘wîl* (Commentary), by Qâzî Abû Sa‘îd ‘Abd Allâh ibn ‘Umar al-Baidâwî interprets *dhu-l-autâd* as meaning *lord of many hosts*. And generally it is also taken as meaning *lord of a strong dominion*.

16 And they say: Our *Rabb*, hasten on for us our portion before the day of Reckoning.^a

17 Bear patiently what they say, and remember Our servant Dâwûd, the possessor of power. He ever turned (to Allâh).

18 Truly We made the mountains subject to him, glorifying (Allâh) at nightfall and sunrise,^a

19 And the birds gathered together. All were obedient to him.

20 And We strengthened his kingdom and We gave him wisdom and a clear judgment.

21 And has the story of the adversaries come to you? When they made an entry into the private chamber by climbing the wall —

22 When they came upon Dâwûd so he was afraid of them. They said: Fear not; two litigants, of whom one has wronged the other, so decide between us with justice, and act not unjustly, and guide us to the right way.

23 This is my brother. He has ninety-nine ewes and I have a single ewe. Then he said, Make it over to me, and he has prevailed against me in dispute.

24 He said: Surely he has wronged you in demanding your ewe (to add) to his own ewes. And surely many partners wrong one another save those who believe and do good, and very few are they! And Dâwûd knew that We had tried him, so he asked his *Rabb* for protection, and he fell down bowing and turned (to Allâh).^a

Prostration

16a. It is clearly a demand on the part of disbelievers for punishment in this life; they were again and again told that their doom was coming, and they wanted it to come immediately.

18a. For the mountains glorifying Allâh, and for the birds in the next verse, see 34:10a.

25 So We gave him this protection, and surely he had a nearness to Us and an excellent resort.

26 O Dâwûd, surely We have made you a ruler in the land; so judge between human beings justly and follow not desire, lest it lead you astray from the path of Allâh. Those who go astray from the path of Allâh, for them is surely a severe chastisement because they forgot the day of Reckoning.

SECTION 3: Sulaimân and his Enemies

27 And We created not the *samâ'* and the earth and what is between them in vain. That is the opinion of those who disbelieve.^a So woe to those who disbelieve on account of the Fire!

24a. The men who thus attacked Dâwûd by *climbing over the wall* were his enemies, as the Qur'ân plainly states. They had thought of taking Dâwûd unawares and putting him to death. But Dâwûd, though terrified, was ready to meet them, and the two men,

finding their plan thus frustrated, made an excuse for coming to him in such an unusual manner. The Qur'ân does not anywhere say that these were *malâ'ikah*; the suggestion is, moreover, inconsistent with their description as *adversaries*, and with their *climbing over the wall*. The story of Dâwûd committing adultery and two *malâ'ikah* having come to him thus to remind him of the sin is a puerile falsehood, wherever it may be found. It has been repudiated by the best Muslim opinion. *Al-Tafsîr al-Kabîr* (Commentary), by Imâm Fakhr al-Dîn Râzî says; “Most of the learned and those who have searched for the truth among them declare this charge false and condemn it as a lie and a mischievous story”. And the Caliph ‘Alî, when he heard the false story, said: “Whoever relates the story of Dâwûd as the story-tellers relate it, I will give him 160 stripes, and this is the punishment of those who falsely charge the prophets” (*Al-Tafsîr al-Kabîr* (Commentary), by Imâm Fakhr al-Dîn Râzî). The words *istaghfara* and *ghafar-nâ* occurring in this and the next verse by no means indicate that Dâwûd had committed a sin, for *istighfâr* really signifies the *seeking of protection* from sin; see 2:286a. Dâwûd sought Divine protection when he saw that his enemies had grown so bold against him; and by *ghafar-nâ* in the next verse is meant the rectification of his affair, the reason given there making this significance clear: “Surely he had a nearness to Us and an excellent resort”. It may be added that a party of the Isrâ’îlites themselves was opposed to Dâwûd and Sulaimân; and the revolt of the ten tribes against Rehoboam, Sulaimân’s son, is a clear proof of this animosity. Hence many of the false charges against these two prophet-kings. The recitation of this verse is followed by actual prostration; see 7:206a.

28 Shall We treat those who believe and do good like the mischief-makers in the earth? Or shall We make the dutiful like the wicked?

29 (This is) a Book that We have revealed to you abounding in good, that they may ponder over its verses, and that the human beings of understanding may mind.

30 And We gave to Dâwûd Sulaimân. Most excellent the servant! Surely he ever turned (to Allâh).

31 When well-bred, swift (horses)^a were brought to him at evening —

32 So he said, I love the good things on account of the remembrance of my *Rabb* — until they were hidden behind the veil.

33 (He said): Bring them back to me. So he began to stroke (their) legs and necks.^a

34 And certainly We tried Sulaimân, and We put on his throne a (mere) body,^a so he turned (to Allâh).

27a. The believer is guided by the principle of the accountability of human actions and of a significance underlying everything that exists in heaven or earth. The disbeliever, on the other hand, makes mischief, as he believes that he will not be any the worse for it, and thus ignores the law of cause and effect, which prevails in the universe.

31a. *Sâfinât* is plural of *sâfin*, which signifies *a horse standing upon three legs and the extremity of the hoof of the fourth leg* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane); hence it means a horse that is still when standing, or a well-bred horse.

33a. *Masaha shai'an* means *he wiped a thing with his hand, or passed his hand over it*, and horses are always stroked on their legs and necks after a race. This significance of the word here is accepted by 'Abd Allâh ibn 'Abbâs (Companion) (*Jâmi' al-Bayân fî Tafsîr al-Qur'ân* (Commentary)), by Imâm Abû Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarîr al-Ṭabarî). The words *tawârat bi-l-hijâb*, which means *they were hidden behind the veil*, refer to the horses, which had gone so far in the race that they were hidden from Sulaimân's eyes. The story that Sulaimân killed the horses has no basis.

34a. By the *mere body* that was put on his throne is meant either his son Rehoboam, who lost the allegiance of all except a single tribe of Isrâ'îl (1 Kings 12:17), or Jeroboam, who led the revolt against the house of David, and, on becoming king of ten tribes, set up image-worship in Dan and Beth-el, the two calves being supposed to be images of Jehovah (1 Kings 12:28), and also began the worship of molten images (1 Kings 14:9). Thus both Rehoboam and Jeroboam answer the description of a *body* (without real life) thrown on Solomon's throne. See also 34:14a.

35 He said: My *Rabb*, forgive me and grant me a kingdom which is not fit for anyone after me;^a surely You are the Great Giver.

36 So We made the wind subservient to him, running gently by His command wherever he desired,

37 And the *shaiyâtîn*, every builder and diver,

38 And others fettered in chains.^a

39 This is Our free gift, so give freely or withhold, without reckoning.

40 And surely he had a nearness to Us and an excellent resort.

SECTION 4: Ayyûb — Triumph of the Righteous

41 And remember Our servant Ayyûb. When he cried to his *Rabb*: The *shaitân* has afflicted me with toil and torment.^a

35a. The previous verse speaks of the imbecile heir-apparent to Sulaimân's throne. Hence we find Sulaimân praying here for a religious kingdom, for that is the only kingdom which is not in danger of being spoiled by an heir. The glory of Sulaimân's temporal kingdom was not maintained after his death; nor has a king like Sulaimân appeared amongst the Isrâ'îlites. By *anyone after me* is meant *anyone amongst the Isrâ'îlites*, not the whole world.

38a. The description given here of the *shaiyâtîn* shows clearly that the designation applies to human beings of foreign tribes subjected to Sulaimân's rule, because it was the latter who were forced into labour by Sulaimân. The words *every builder and diver* makes it clear that the *jinn* and *shaiyâtîn* who are related to have been subjected to Sulaimân were only human beings. This is further shown by the words *fettered in chains*; chains are needed to keep in control material beings, such as human beings. See also 34:12c.

41a. The story of Ayyûb is given here as well as in the 21st chapter, the reference being more brief there than here. All that the Qur'ân states about him is that he was a righteous person who suffered some kind of distress, remained patient under trials, and was ultimately delivered from affliction. All these circumstances of his life are disposed of in the space of a few lines. The dramatic poem of forty-two chapters known as the Book of Job finds no place in the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân.

The toil and torment of which Ayyûb complains seem to relate to some journey of his in a desert, where he finds himself in an evil plight, on account of the fatigue of the journey and the thirst which afflicts him. There are many circumstances which point to this conclusion. The use of the word *nuṣb*, signifying *toil* or *fatigue*, is one of them. Another is that, as a remedy for this, he is led to a place where he finds a cool washing-place and a drink. A third is the mention of the *shaitân* in connection with his trouble, for *shaitân al-falâ*, lit., *the evil-ones of the desert*, signifies *thirst* (*Al-Qâmûs al-Muhîṭ* (Dictionary), by *Shaiḫ* Majd al-Dîn Muḥammad ibn Ya'qûb Al-Firozâbâdî and the *Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). The mention of this

distressing journey of Job contains, no doubt, a hint to the Prophet's long journey from Makkah to Madînah, which was to be undertaken under particularly distressing circumstances. This journey of Ayyûb was undoubtedly undertaken in connection with the delivery of the message with which he was entrusted, just as in the case of the Prophet's Flight from Makkah to Madînah.

42 Urge with your foot; here is a cool washing-place and a drink.^a

43 And We gave him his people and the like of them with them,^a a mercy from Us, and a reminder for human beings of understanding.

44 And take in your hand few worldly goods and earn goodness therewith and incline not to falsehood.^a Surely We found him patient; most excellent the servant! Surely he (ever) turned (to Us).

42a. *Urkud bi-rijli-ka* literally signifies *urge with thy foot*, the significance being *urge thy horse*. The word *rakada* is used especially in connection with a beast, meaning, as *Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane says, *he struck and hit therewith as one strikes and hits therewith a beast*. This special use is made clear in all lexicons by further examples of the use of the word; *rakadtū* means *I urged the horse to trot with my foot*; *rakada*, *he struck the beast to urge it with a foot* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). The meaning is therefore *urge your horse to go further*, and the result is that there he finds a place where he is able to refresh himself both with drink and washing. He thought that he was in a waterless desert, and he complained that he was troubled with fatigue from the journey and with thirst; in reply he is told to urge his horse or the beast he rode upon to trot further on, where he will find rest. It is a lesson not to despair under difficulties.

43a. *Ahla-hû* may mean either *his people* or *his family*. The *giving* of *ahl* to him means that he met them again. The addition of the *like of them with them* shows that his *followers* are meant here. As I have already stated, there is a prophetic reference to the Prophet's Flight in Ayyûb's journey, and the Prophet again met not only his followers who fled from Makkah, but found also *the like of them* at Madînah, i.e., the Ansâr of Madînah.

44a. I make a departure here from the ordinary rendering of these words which are translated thus: "Take in your hand a branch and smite therewith and break not the oath". To explain these words, a story is added that Ayyûb had taken an oath to give a

hundred stripes to his wife on account of her impatience in his affliction, but that he was commanded to keep the oath by striking her with a bundle of twigs. This story has no basis. Even if we adopt this significance, the meaning would be that Ayyûb was commanded to be lenient in his dealing with his enemies when he ultimately vanquished them, like a man who instead of using the sword used a bundle of twigs to punish his enemies. But the word *dighth* means a *handful of twigs* or *shrubs* as also a *handful of worldly goods*, and the words *âkhhidh al-dighth*, occurring in a *ḥadīth*, are explained by T as meaning *he who obtains somewhat of worldly goods* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). About the word *darb*, it has already been noted that it carries a number of significances; see 2:60a. There are reasons to think that Ayyûb was a rich man, and hence I think he is here told not to be inclined too much to the attainment of worldly riches. They are only needed to the extent of enabling a man to earn goodness thereby.

45 And remember Our servants Ibrâhîm and Ishâq and Ya‘qûb, men of power and insight.

46 We indeed purified them by a pure quality, the keeping in mind of the (final) abode.

47 And surely they were with Us, of the elect, the best.

48 And remember Ismâ‘îl and Al-yash‘a and Dhu-l-Kifl; and they were all of the best.

49 This is a reminder. And surely there is an excellent resort for the dutiful:

50 Gardens of perpetuity — the doors are opened for them.^a

51 Reclining therein, calling therein for many fruits and drink.

52 And with them are those modest in gaze, equals in age.^a

53 This is what you are promised for the day of Reckoning.

54 Surely this is Our sustenance; it will never come to an end —

50a. That is, the doors of these gardens are opened for them in this very life; or, they are always open to them.

52a. For the *modest in gaze*, see 37:49a. Here, in addition, they are called *atrab* or *equals in age*, as showing that their growth begins with the growth of spiritual life in man, thus showing that they are the fruits of good deeds, whether done by males or females, who would all have these fruits equally.

- 55** This (is for the good)! And surely there is an evil resort for the inordinate—
- 56** Hell. They will enter it. So evil is the resting-place.
- 57** This — so let them taste it, boiling and intensely cold (drink),^a
- 58** And other similar (punishment), of various sorts.^a
- 59** This is an army rushing headlong with you^a— no welcome for them! Surely they will burn in fire.
- 60** They say:^a Nay! You — no welcome to you! You prepared it for us, so evil is the resting-place.
- 61** They say: Our *Rabb*, whoever prepared it for us, give him more, a double, punishment in the Fire.
- 62** And they say: What is the matter with us? — We see not men whom we used to count among the vicious.
- 63** Did we (only) take them in scorn, or do our eyes miss them?
- 64** That surely is the truth — the contending one with another of the inmates of the Fire.

57a. The word *ghassâq*, which is generally rendered as *ichor*, is really a qualification of *drink* (understood, as in the case of *hamîm*, which means *boiling*), and means *intensely cold* (*Tâj al-‘Arûs* (Dictionary), by *Imâm Muhibb al-Dîn Abu-l-Faid Murtaḍâ*). It also means *stinking* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane), but being mentioned along with *hamîm*, or boiling, the significance adopted suits the context. They will be made to consume intensely hot and intensely cold drink, because they went to the two extremes and did not follow the mean.

58a. *‘Azwâj* is plural of *zauj*, which means *a pair* or *one of a pair*, also *sort* or *species* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). The word may carry the significance adopted or it may mean *in pairs*, referring to the two extremes, as in the previous verse.

59a. This is the army of blind followers of falsehood.

60a. The speakers here are the blind followers, those addressed being the ringleaders.

SECTION 5: Opposition to Prophets

- 65** Say: I am only a warner; and there is no Deity but Allâh, the One, the Subduer (of all) —

66 The *Rabb* of the *samâwât* and the earth and what is between them, the Mighty, the Forgiving.

67 Say: It is a message of importance,^a

68 From which you turn away.

69 I have no knowledge of the exalted chiefs when they contend.^a

70 Only this is revealed to me that I am a plain warner.

71 When your *Rabb* said to the *malâ'ikah*: Surely I am going to create a mortal from dust.^a

72 So when I have made him complete and **breathed into him of My spirit, fall down** submitting to him.

73 And the *malâ'ikah* submitted, all of them,

74 But not Iblîs.^a He was proud and he was one of the disbelievers.

75 He said: O Iblîs, what prevented you from submitting to him whom I created with both My hands? Are you proud or are you of the exalted ones?

67a. The message of importance is the Prophet's message to the whole of humanity, the message which discloses the vast religious realm hidden to the ordinary human eye. That those who turn away from it are doomed to perdition is the necessary consequence, and hence the doom of the opponents forms part of this message.

69a. The exalted chiefs are the celestial forces which come first to know of the Divine decree relating to the punishment of the opponents of Truth, *metaphorically*, referred to in v. 68. It is these opponents that are spoken of here as *contending*; they carried on a contention against Truth.

71a. The creation of Âdam (human beings) and the submission of the *malâ'ikah* typifies the raising of a prophet and the submission to him of the good and the righteous. Compare 2:30, etc.

74a. See 2:34b, 34c.

76 He said: I am better than he; You hast created me of fire, and him You did create of dust.^a

77 He said: Go forth from hence! surely you are driven away:

78 And surely My curse is on you to the day of Judgment.

79 He said: My *Rabb*, respite me to the day that they are raised.^a

80 He said: Surely you are of the respited ones.

81 Till the day of the time made known.

82 He said: Then, by Your Might! I will surely lead them all astray,

83 Except Your servants from among them, the purified ones.

84 He said: The Truth is, and the truth I speak —

85 That I shall fill hell with you and with all those among them who follow you.

86 Say: I ask you no reward for it; nor am I of the impostors.

87 It is naught but a Reminder to the nations.

88 And certainly you will come to know about it after a time.

76a. The creation from fire is an indication of rebelliousness, of a fiery temper, and the creation from dust signifies submissiveness and meekness; see 7:12a.

79a. See 15:36a.